

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6680

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 SAO PAULO 0171

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, SHUM, BR

SUBJECT: GENERAL EDNARDO REMOVAL SITREP (MID-MORNING JANUARY 21)
AND COMMENTARY

REF: BRASILIA 536

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT GEISEL'S SUDDEN RELIEF OF GENERAL EDNARDO D'AVILA MELO AS COMMANDER OF THE SECOND ARMY IN SAO PAULO IS SEEN AS A RESPONSE TO EDNARDO'S FAILURE TO MEET A COMMITMENT THAT THE INCIDENT INVOLVING THE DEATH OF JOURNALIST VLADIMIR HERZOG AS A RESULT OF TORTURE LAST OCTOBER WHILE UNDER SECOND ARMY CUSTODY WOULD NOT BE REPEATED AGAIN. THE NUMBER OF ARRESTS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AT THE SECOND ARMY'S DOI UNIT APPARENTLY PICKED UP IN DECEMBER AND REPORTS OF RENEWED TORTURE CIRCULATED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES LATE LAST WEEK. DESPITE SOME SPECULATION THAT GENERAL EDNARDO MIGHT ATTEMPT TO RESIST HIS TRANSFER ORDER, HE RELINQUISHED HIS COMMAND JANUARY 20 AND REQUESTED IMMEDIATE TRANSFER TO THE RESERVES, THEREBY REJECTING HIS ASSIGNMENT AS CHIEF OF THE ARMY'S RESEARCH AND TRAINING DEPARTMENT. THE REACTION TO GENERAL EDNARDO'S RELIEF ON THE PART OF HIS SUPPORTERS AT THE SECOND ARMY COMMAND IS SAID TO BE ONE OF SHOCK AND ANGER, BUT GEISEL LOYALISTS ARE NOW IN CHARGE AND THERE HAS BEEN NO OPEN OUTCRY. MEMBERS OF THE DOI UNIT INVOLVED IN THE DEATH OF THE
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PRISONER LAST SATURDAY REPORTEDLY ARE BEING HELD FOR QUESTIONING.

NEVERTHELESS, THE ISSUE REMAINS HOW FAR THE NEW SECOND ARMY COMMANDER, GENERAL DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO, CAN GO IN IMPLEMENTING PRESIDENT GEISEL'S PRESUMED EFFORT TO END HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THERE IS RENEWED SPECULATION THAT GEISEL MAY REVIVE AN OLD ATTEMPT TO TRANSFER INTERNAL SECURITY RESPONSIBILITIES FROM THE ARMY TO THE CIVILIAN POLICE. HOWEVER, ANY SUCH MOVES TOWARDS A GREATER RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS COULD BE INTERPRETED WITHIN THE ARMY AS NOT ONLY A WEAKENING OF THE NATION'S RESOLVE TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST LEFTIST SUBVERSION BUT ALSO AS A POSSIBLE FIRST STEP TOWARDS A PURGE OF THOSE SECURITY ELEMENTS WHICH HAVE BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE FIGHT AGAINST SUBVERSION. THERE IS FEAR IN SOME QUARTERS THAT ANY SUBSTANTIAL GOVERNMENT EFFORT TO BRING THE INTERNAL SECURITY APPARATUS UNDER CONTROL COULD BE MET BY A REVIVAL OF CLANDESTINE "DEATH SQUAD" - LIKE ACTIVITIES ON THE PART OF RADICAL MILITARY AND SECURITY ELEMENTS. IN THE MEANTIME, A MASS HAS BEEN SCHEDULED FOR THE WORKER WHO DIED IN DOI, BUT AN EFFORT APPEARS UNDERWAY TO LIMIT ATTENDANCE SO THAT IT DOES NOT REACH THE PROPORTIONS OF THE ECUMENICAL SERVICE HELD FOR THE JOURNALIST HERZOG LAST OCTOBER. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO "O ESTADO" SOURCES, BASED LARGELY ON INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE NEWSPAPER'S BRASILIA BUREAU CHIEF CARLOS CHAGAS, PRESIDENT GEISEL WAS APPRISED SUNDAY, JANUARY 18, OF THE DEATH THE PREVIOUS DAY, JANUARY 17, OF METALLURGICAL WORKER MANOEL FIEL FILHO WHILE UNDER CONFINEMENT AT CODI/DOI OF THE SECOND ARMY IN SAO PAULO. GEISEL FIRST MET WITH MINISTER OF THE ARMY SILVIO FROTA ON SUNDAY TO DISCUSS THE CASE AND AT THAT MEETING REPORTEDLY FROTA AGREED WITH GEISEL THAT GENERAL EDNARDO D'AVILA MELO SHOULD BE RELIEVED OF HIS COMMAND OF THE SECOND ARMY IN ORDER TO LIMIT THE DAMAGE RENDERED TO THE ARMY AND THE GOVERNMENT'S PRESTIGE AND REPUTATION. "O ESTADO" MANAGING EDITOR OLIVEIROS FERREIRA SPECULATES THAT GEISEL REACHED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE ARMY CHIEFS FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF JOURNALIST VLADIMIR HERZOG IN OCTOBER THAT THE OFFICIAL MILITARY BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO HERZOG'S DEATH HEADED BY GENERAL CERQUEIRA LIMA WOULD BE ALLOWED TO TURN IN A VERDICT OF "SUICIDE" (WITH GEISEL'S FULL KNOWLEDGE THAT THE DEATH IN THAT CASE WAS CAUSED BY TORTURE) IN RETURN FOR A CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMITMENT THAT THE EXCESSES WOULD HENCEFORTH TERMINATE AND THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER SUCH OCCURENCES AT DOI. ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF SPECULATION -- AND WE EMPHASIZE THAT THIS MUST STILL BE CATEGORIZED AS SPECULATION AS OF THIS WRITING -- THE WORKER'S DEATH LAST SATURDAY WAS REGARDED BY GEISEL AS THE LAST STRAW IN A SERIES OF DEFIANT ACTIONS EMANATING FROM GENERAL EDNARDO'S COMMAND AND AS A VIOLATION OF A SPECIFIC COMMITMENT TO END THE TORTURE. THE DOI UNIT IN SAO PAULO

WAS INSUBORDINATE, PROBABLY DEFIANTLY SO, AND GENERAL EDNARDO WAS EITHER UNWILLING OR UNABLE TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT. HAVING FAILED AT LEAST TO LIVE UP TO HIS NOMINAL RESPONSIBILITIES AS AREA COMMANDER AND POSSIBLY INSUBORDINATE HIMSELF, EDNARDO HAD TO GO. FROTA ACCEDED, POSSIBLY ON THE BASIS OF THE ARGUMENT THAT THE ACTION WAS NECESSARY TO PRESERVE THE MILITARY'S GOOD NAME.

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3. NONE OF OUR USUAL TRADE UNION, JOURNALIST OR CHURCH SOURCES COULD PROVIDE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION CONCERNING THE WORKER WHOSE DEATH PRECIPATED GENERAL D'AVILA'S SUDDEN TRANSFER BEYOND THAT WHICH HAS APPEARED IN THE PRESS. FIEL WAS EVIDENTLY A WELL-PAID SECTION CHIEF IN A US-OWNED SAO PAULO METALWORKING PLANT. WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT HE WAS ACTIVE IN EITHER TRADE UNION OR POLITICAL AFFAIRS. HE WAS NEVER A TRADE UNION LEADER. THE HEAD OF THE SAO PAULO STATE FEDERATION OF METALWORKERS HAD NEVER HEARD OF HIM BEFORE. HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT OF THE SAO PAULO CITY METALURGICAL UNION LOCAL SENT AN UNUSUALLY STRONGLY WORDED TELEGRAM TO PRESIDENT GEISEL PROTESTING FIEL'S DEATH AND DEMANDING AN INVESTIGATION. ACCORDING TO JOURNALIST AND ARCHDIOCESAN SOURCES, FIEL WAS ARRESTED JANUARY 16 AND DIED UNDER TORTURE IN THE SAME CELL AS HIS UNLUCKY PREDECESSORS, HERZOG (IN OCTOBER) AND THE PM RESERVE 2ND LT. JOSE FERREIRA DE ALMEIDA (JULY-AUGUST). IN ALL THREE CASES, THE CAUSE OF DEATH CLAIMED BY THE DOI UNIT WAS SUICIDE BY HANGING (I.E. ASPHYXIATION). ACCORDING TO

UNCONFIRMED REPORTS, THE CAUSE OF DEATH IN THIS CASE, AS IN THE HERZOG CASE, WAS CERTIFIED BY DOCTOR HARRY SHIBATA, A MEMBER OF THE STATE FORENSIC MEDICAL STAFF, WHO IS REFERENCED IN THE OCTOBER 23, 1975, LETTER TO THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT OF THE OAB EMITTED BY 35 TERRORISTS IMPRISONED IN SAO PAULO (PARTS OF WHICH WERE PRINTED IN THE JANUARY 20 "O ESTADO") AS "THE DR. MENGELE OF BRAZIL," A PHRASE THAT IS NOW LIKELY CONFIDENTIAL

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TO GAIN WIDER CURRENCY. THE ARCHDIOCESAN JUSTICE AND PEACE COMMITTEE HAS RECEIVED FURTHER DENUNCIATIONS CONCERNING THE ARREST OF A WOMAN NAMED ROSARIO AMADO ANDRADE ON THE SAME DAY THAT FIEL FILHO WAS ARRESTED AND THE "DISAPPEARANCE" OF AT LEAST ONE OTHER PERSON DURING THE SAME TIME FRAME. ACCORDING TO A COMMITTEE SOURCE, THE DOI BEGAN ARRESTING WARD BOSSES IN SANTOS OF FEDERAL DEPUTY MARCELO GATO AND STATE DEPUTY NELSON FABIANO SOBRINHO SHORTLY AFTER THEIR CASSATIONS IN LATE DECEMBER. FEDERAL DEPUTY AIRTON SOARES TOLD US JANUARY 16 THAT HE HAD JUST LEARNED OF AT LEAST ONE CASE OF TORTURE WHICH HAD TAKEN PLACE AT DOI THE PREVIOUS DAY - THE FIRST TO COME TO HIS ATTENTION SINCE THE HERZOG AFFAIR.

4. AS TO BE EXPECTED, THERE WAS SOME DEGREE OF SPECULATION IN LOCAL POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT GENERAL EDNARDO MIGHT ATTEMPT TO RESIST HIS TRANSFER ORDER. SUCH SPECULATION WAS POSSIBLY INSPIRED BY RUMORMONGERING CIRCULATING OVER THE PAST MONTH OR SO THAT EDNARDO HAD EXERTED PRESSURE WITHIN THE MILITARY INSTITUTION TO HAVE HIMSELF RETAINED AS COMMANDER OF THE SECOND ARMY BEYOND HIS ANTICIPATED TRANSFER DATE, WHICH HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE IN MARCH. HOWEVER, THE COMMANDER OF THE 2ND MILITARY REGION, GENERAL PACCA DA FONSECA (CONSIDERED TO BE A GEISEL MAN), ASSUMED INTERIM COMMAND OF SECOND ARMY HEADQUARTERS AT 8:0 A.M. JANUARY 20. GENERAL D'AVILA WAS REPORTED NOT ONLY TO HAVE RELINQUISHED COMMAND TO PACCA (THEREBY AVOIDING A TRANSFER CEREMONY WITH GENERAL DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO LATE THIS WEEK) BUT TO HAVE ALSO SUBMITTED A REQUEST FOR HIS IMMEDIATE TRANSFER TO THE RESERVES, AN ACTION WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BECOME COMPULSORY UNTIL SOMETIME NEXT YEAR. ACCORDING TO AN EYEWITNESS, THE INITIAL REACTION MONDAY EVENING AND TUESDAY MORNING AT SECOND ARMY HEADQUARTERS TO THE LATE JANUARY 19 ANNOUNCEMENT FROM BRASILIA OF EDNARDO'S TRANSFER WAS ONE OF SHOCK AND SURPRISE. THERE IS SEETHING ANGER AMONG THE COLONELS, ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, BUT THE DISCONTENT IS STILL SUBDUED, SINCE THE LEADING GENERALS ARE NOW GEISEL MEN. HE BELIEVES IT WILL TAKE SOME DAYS BEFORE THERE IS ANY KIND OF A REACTION TO THE SHOCK WAVES NOW REVERBERATING THROUGHOUT ALL OF THE ARMY COMMANDS IN THE COUNTRY AS A RESULT OF MONDAY'S

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5. THAT GENERAL DILERMANDO GOMES MONTEIRO, REPORTED TO BE A CASTELLISTA AND AN OLD COMRADE OF GEISEL'S, WAS GEISEL'S CHOICE TO REPLACE GENERAL D'AVILA IN MARCH 1976 WAS WIDELY COMMENTED UPON IN SAO PAULO POLITICAL CIRCLES FOR MONTHS. SUCH SPECULATION FIRST CAME TO OUR ATTENTION AROUND MID-1975, AS WE REPORTED AT THE TIME. THE DEATH OF THE WORKER FIEL, IN EFFECT, HAS NOW PERMITTED GEISEL TO ADVANCE HIS TIMETABLE. GENERAL DILERMANDO'S ASSUMPTION OF COMMAND OF THE SECOND ARMY, NOW CONFIRMED TO TAKE PLACE JANUARY 23, ALONG WITH FORMER PRESIDENTIAL AIDE COLONEL HUGO MORAES REGO'S RECENT PROMOTION TO GENERAL AND ASSIGNMENT AS COMMANDER OF THE BRIGADE AT CAMPINAS, WOULD APPEAR TO SUPPORT THE CONTENTION ADVANCED BY PRESIDENT OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES CELIO BORJA TO EMBOFFS SOME MONTHS AGO THAT GEISEL WAS WORKING ON A PLAN TO ELIMINATE THE HARDLINERS FROM THE SECOND ARMY COMMAND AS A STEP TOWARD REVIVING THE "DISTENSAO" PROCESS. AS WE HAVE REPORTED EARLIER, THE GEISEL ASCENDANCY THESIS ALSO BECAME

POPULAR IN POLITICAL CIRCLES HERE FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO
SAO PAULO IN THE AFTERMATH OF HERZOG'S DEATH, WHICH THEN
FURTHER BECAME AMPLIFIED BY REPORTS LEAKED FROM
BRASILIA (BUT SUBSEQUENTLY DENIED BY JUSTICE MINISTER
FALCAO) THAT GENERAL GOLBERY WOULD OVERSEE AN ATTEMPT TO
WORK UP A CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM PACKAGE DURING THE PRESENT
LEGISLATIVE RECESS. NEVERTHELESS, THE ISSUANCE OF THE
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FINDINGS OF THE MILITARY BOARD OF INQUIRY INTO HERZOG'S
DEATH, THE CASSATION OF THE TWO MDB DEPUTIES (ONE FEDERAL
AND ONE STATE) FROM SAO PAULO, AND THE RECENT RESTRICTIONS
IMPOSED ON MDB NATIONAL PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES DURING
HIS PRESENT POLITICAL TRIP IN THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY
HAD ALL CONTRIBUTED TO THE STRONGLY HELD CONCLUSION REACHED
LATELY IN LOCAL POLITICAL CIRCLES THAT "DISTENSAO" WAS NOW NOT
ONLY DEAD BUT BURIED. OLIVEIROS FERREIRA'S SPECULATIONS IN
PARA 2 ABOVE REFLECTS ONE ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THESE APPARENT
CONTRADICTIONS. THEY WOULD ALSO APPEAR TO SUGGEST CAUTION
IN NOT EXAGGERATING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EDNARDO'S RELIEF AND
HIS REPLACEMENT BY DILERMANDO. THE PICTURE THAT EMERGES
FROM OLIVEIROS' SPECULATION IS ONE OF CONSTANTLY SHIFTING SANDS
WITHIN THE MILITARY INSTITUTION WHICH NECESSARILY LIMITS
POLITICAL MOVEMENT ON GEISEL'S PART TO SMALL STEPS AT A TIME,
MANY OF WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY HAVE TO BE COUNTERBALANCED BY
APPARENT FEINTS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. WE BELIEVE THAT
THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE STILL RELEVANT: (A) HOW FAR DOES
GEISEL REALLY WANT TO GO IN THE "DISTENSAO" PROCESS? (B)
HOW FAR CAN GEISEL AND DILERMANDO REALISTICALLY GO?
ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, GENERAL EDNARDO, BEFORE HE
RELINQUISHED HIS COMMAND, PROVISIONALLY ORDERED THE
DETENTION OF THE DOI PERSONNEL ON DUTY AT THE TIME OF FIEL'S
DEATH. HOWEVER, THE INTELLIGENCE/SECURITY BROTHERHOOD
WITHIN THE ARMY HAS YET TO BE HEARD FROM. THE LISTS OF
TORTURERS PROVIDED BY THE 35 TERRORISTS LENDS A NOTION OF
SUPPORT TO THE THESIS THAT MEMBERSHIP IN "THE SYSTEM" IS
EXTENSIVE. THE CONCERNS OF THIS GROUP, FACED WITH THE LIKELY
REPERCUSSIONS OF ANY SUBSTANTIAL MOVES TOWARDS "DISTENSAO,"
HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN IDENTIFIED AND THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE
ACCENTUATED NOW. BEYOND THIS, THERE IS THE QUESTION OF HOW
SERIOUSLY COMMITTED THE SO-CALLED GEISEL LOYALISTS IN THE
MILITARY INSTITUTION REALLY ARE TO AN END TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS. WE SUSPECT THAT A GOOD MANY OF THOSE TODAY CONSIDERED
TO BE GEISEL MEN BELIEVE IN THE NECESSARY EVIL OF
EXTRACTING VITAL INTELLIGENCE VIA TORTURE WHEN INTERNAL SECURITY
IS ASSUMED TO BE AT STAKE. SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE ELEMENTS
UNDOUBTEDLY WILL ASSERT THAT EDNARDO'S RELIEF AND THE NEW
IMPETUS IT HAS ALREADY GIVEN TO THE ADVOCATES OF "DISTENSAO"
WILL INEVITABLY ADVANCE COMMUNIST INTERESTS IN BRAZIL. THEY
CAN START BY POINTING TO THE COMMENTARY APPEARING IN THE

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PRESS WHICH ALREADY HAS ACCOMPANIED THE NEWS OF GENERAL EDNARDO'S RELIEF. PARTICULARLY IN "O ESTADO" THERE IS GREAT EMPHASIS BEING PLACED EXPLICITLY ON THE TORTURE ISSUE AT DOI AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESTIGE OF THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY INSTITUTION -- WHICH AS LATE AS A FEW WEEKS AGO WAS A NEARLY UNTOUCHABLE SUBJECT IN THE MEDIA CAPABLE OF PRECIPITATING THE CASSATION OF TWO DEPUTIES. THE SECURITY MEN UNDOUBTEDLY WILL ALSO POINT TO THE WORKER'S MASS FOR FIEL REPORTEDLY SCHEDULED BY THE ARCHDIOCESE (IN CARDINAL ARNS' ABSENCE ON LEAVE) TO TAKE PLACE JANUARY 24. (HOWEVER, SOME UNION SOURCES SUGGEST THERE IS AN EFFORT AFOOT TO MINIMIZE UNION ATTENDANCE.)

6. LONGTIME MILITARY OBSERVER OLIVEIROS FERREIRA BELIEVES THAT GEISEL'S FORCEFUL STAND AGAINST EDNARDO NOW HAS TO BE COMPENSATED BY A COUNTERACTION TO APPEASE THE HARDLINE. HIS GUESS IS THAT GENERAL GOLBERY, WHO REPORTEDLY HAS NOT RECOVERED FROM HIS MEDICAL ILLS, MAY HAVE TO BE SACRIFICED. HE ALSO BELIEVES THAT GEISEL WILL CONTINUE TO HANG ON TO IA-5 AND THAT HE PROBABLY WILL MOVE TO FURTHER RESTRICT THE MDB'S RANGE OF ACTION IN THE COMING MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS - THROUGH A CAMPAIGN TO INTIMIDATE MDB CANDIDATES FROM ENTERING THE MAYORALTY AND ALDERMEN RACES - EVEN THOUGH HE THINKS GEISEL KNOWS ANY SUCH MEASURES WILL BE LARGELY UNSUCCESSFUL AND FUTILE.

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7. AS REVEALED IN JANUARY 20 "O ESTADO," THERE IS A LINE OF SPECULATION EMANATING FROM THE PAST WEEKEND'S EVENTS THAT GEISEL WILL REVIVE HIS PROPOSAL TO TRANSFER SECURITY RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE CIVILIAN POLICE. ACCORDING TO "O ESTADO'S" INFORMATION, THE CURRENT SPECULATION WITH RESPECT TO SAO PAULO AT LEAST TURNS ON THE STATE DEOPS RATHER THAN THE FEDERAL POLICE (DPF), AS WAS THE CASE IN GEISEL/ GOLBERY'S LAST SUCH EFFORT. HOWEVER, OLIVEIROS FERREIRA FEARS THAT ANY MOVE TO ELIMINATE DOI WOULD MERELY RESULT IN A PROLIFERATION OF "THE CLANDESTINE ARM OF REPRESSION," OF WHICH THERE HAS BEEN ONLY SPORADIC APPEARANCES UNTIL NOW. (INCIDENTALLY, FEDERAL DEPUTY AIRTON SOARES TOLD US THAT THE LAWYER ALFONSO CELSO NOGUEIRA MONTEIRO WAS TORTURED IN THE SAME RAVINE NEAR COTIA, SAO PAULO, AS PREVIOUS VICTIMS OF THE SAO PAULO "DEATH SQUAD," STRENGTHENING IN HIS VIEW THE CONTENTION THAT THE GROUP INVOLVED IN THE MONTEIRO CASE WAS ORGANIZED BY THE POLICE OR MILITARY.) OLIVEIROS FERREIRA FEARS THE CREATION OF A CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATION COMBINING THE OBJECTIVES OF THE ARGENTINE AAA AND THE FRENCH OAS, WHOSE VICTIMS WOULD NOT ONLY BE LEFTIST SUBVERSIVES BUT ALSO MILITARY OFFICERS SUPPORTING GEISEL. HIS TENTATIVE CONCLUSION IS THAT GENERAL DILERMANDO MAY BE FORCED TO ADAPT TO THE REALITIES OF THE SECOND ARMY COMMAND JUST AS, IT IS ALLEGED BY SOME, OCCURRED IN THE CASE OF HIS PREDECESSOR, GENERAL EDNARDO.
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8. THIS MESSAGE IS SUBMITTED WITH THE CONCURRENCE OF THE EMBASSY.
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